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1737 TONY MAURO

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WASHINGTON - THE AGGESSIVE ATTEMPT TO RESCUE THE AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN HAD ABOUT A 50-50 CHANCE FOR SUCCESS, SAYS RICHARD HELMS, FORMER CIA DIRECTOR AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO IRAN.

BUT HE ADDED THE OBSERVATION: FROM EXPERIENCE, THAT "IN THIS TYPE OF OPERATION, ANYTHING THAT CAN GO WRONG WILL GO WRONG."

INTERVIEWED FRIDAY MORNING IN HIS OFFICE WHERE HE WORKS AS A CONSULTANT, HELMS SAID: "ANYONE WHO EVER GETS INVOLVED IN SOMETHING LIKE THIS LEARNS A GREAT DEAL OF HUMILITY. THERE ARE A GREAT NUMBER OF THINGS THAT CAN GO WRONG."

NEVERTHELESS, HELMS SAID: "I AM NOT ONE OF THOSE WHO BELIEVED THERE WAS NEVER ANY CHANCE FOR SUCCESS FOR AN OPERATION SUCH AS THIS. IT COULD HAVE BEEN BROUGHT OFF." HELMS SAID NO ONE FROM THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION SOLICITED HIS ADVICE ON THE SUBJECT.

FROM HIS YEARS AS AMBASSADOR IN IRAN, HELMS RECALLED: "IT IS RELATIVELY EASY TO DROP A HELICOPTER DOWN FROM THE SKY INTO THE DESERTY GROUNDS. I REMEMBER WHEN HENRY KISSINGER VISITED, WE USED THE HELICOPTER ALL THE TIME TO GET HIM TO APPOINTMENTS ON TIME AND AVOID THE TERRIBLE TRAFFIC."

IN ADDITION, HELMS SAID, FRIDAY WAS A GOOD DAY TO PICK FOR THE ATTEMPT. "IT'S SABBATH, AND FEW PEOPLE ARE ON THE STREETS," HE SAID. "IT'S THE ONLY DAY OF THE WEEK YOU CAN GET AROUND TOWN IN A CAR."

AND STAGING AREAS ARE PLENTIFUL IN IRAN, HELMS NOTED. "MOST OF THE COUNTRY IS QUITE BARREN," HE SAID.

BUT, ALTHOUGH CONCEDED THAT THE MISSION WAS FEASIBLE FROM A STRATEGIC POINT OF VIEW, HELMS SAID THAT FROM A FOREIGN POLICY STANDPOINT "THE TIMING WAS TERRIBLE. AS FOREIGN POLICY, IT WAS A BIG MISTAKE."

"THIS SORT OF THING YOU DO PROMPTLY AT THE TIME OF OUTRAGES, SOON AFTER THE TAKING BEGINS."

INSTEAD, SAID HELMS, CARTER PREACHED A POLICY OF RESTRAINT, AND WITHIN THE LAST WEEK GOT AMERICA'S EUROPEAN ALLIES ON HIS SIDE. "THEN SUDDENLY HE TURNS AROUND AND DOES THIS," HE SAID. "THE ALLIES HAVE A PERFECT RIGHT TO FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN BETRAYED."

A STRONG CASE COULD HAVE BEEN MADE, HELMS SAID, FOR "TURNING OUR BACKS ON THE HOSTAGES" AS THE BEST WAY OF SECURING THEIR RELEASE. BY FOCUSING SO MUCH ATTENTION ON THE HOSTAGES, THE UNITED STATES HAS PLAYED INTO THE HANDS OF AYATOLLAH KHOMENI, WHO IS TOYING WITH THIS COUNTRY FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL PURPOSES, HE SAID.

"IF WE HAD NOT DONE THIS, THE HOSTAGES WOULD HAVE TURNED INTO A USELESS ANTI-IRAN CAMPAIGN," HE SAID. "THEY WOULD NOT BE HARMED."

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Notes on People

Helms Can't Be Spooked

The author had admittedly been pretty hard on his subject, Richard Helms, the former Director of Central Intelligence. But when Thomas Powers was given an award Monday night for his book, "The Man Who Kept Secrets," Mr. Helms not only attended but also graciously applauded.

The prize, for "intelligent writing on intelligence," was awarded by the National Intelligence Study Center, a group formed a year ago by some former American intelligence officers. Other prizes went to Ralph E. Weber for his scholarly study, "U.S. Diplomatic Codes and Ciphers, 1775 to 1938"; to Dino Brugoni and Robert G. Poirier for their retrospective aerial reconnaissance analysis of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps; to Edwin Warner of Time magazine for an article about the C.I.A., and, in what seems a demonstration of the award group's own thoroughness, to Mark L. Attanasio for an undergraduate essay at Brown University on American intelligence failures in Chile.

Judith Cummings,
Laurie Johnston

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MOVIES

Journalism at the Movies

Many younger documentarians, weaned in the '60s, are turning to political subjects. The most ambitious film is *On Company Business*, a powerful, three-hour investigation of the CIA by Allan Francovich and Howard Drach. Their \$300,000 epic does not purport to offer new revelations of covert skulduggery: much of the material that emerges in their interviews with CIA dissidents Phillip Agee, Victor Marchetti and John Stockwell, as well as CIA defenders David Atlee Phillips, William Colby and Richard Helms, has been published in their various books. But the film achieves a valuable overview of "The Company" from its inception in 1947 to the beginnings of the Carter Administration. The message is clear: the CIA cannot be condemned as an isolated band of renegade spooks. It is and always has been carrying out the policies of the White House and the multinational corporations. By the end of this draining account, it comes as no surprise to learn that the CIA even infiltrated the Senate committee that was investigating it.

EXCERPTED